

**TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF OKOKHUO IN OVIA NORTH EAST, UP
TO 2020AD**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this work was carried out by **AYEKI SOPHIA OSAHIMWIAN** in the Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Art, University of Benin, Benin City.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God who in his infinite mercy has kept me alive and brought me this far in life, for by his Grace this project became a reality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I give all glory and adoration to God almighty, who's my source, sustainer, giver of all knowledge and understanding, who spared my life throughout the course of this Work.

I am especially grateful and thankful to my project supervisor, Mr. Ekhatobogio Osaisonor Godfrey for his support, suggestions and patience throughout the course of this project. Your suggestions and corrections greatly assisted me and contributed to the successful completion of this project.

I will also like to express my gratitude to some scholarly distinguished personalities of my department, who in one way or the other contributed to my knowledge and understanding of History. In persons of, Prof. E.A Erhagbe, Prof. O.B Osadolor, Prof. J. I. Osagie, Dr. Charles Osarumwense, Dr. Williams Orhukpe, Mr. Victor O. Aiguobarueghian, Dr. Daniel Iwueze, Mr. E. Toby, Mr. D. Orobator, and Mrs. I. Enadeghe, thank you for your academic support and enormous impacts, may God bless

I will also like to appreciate my parents, late Mr. Emmanuel Osahimwian and Mrs Grace Omosigho for being there for me and their great support through the course of my study in this institution, I will also like to appreciate my siblings, Uyi Osahimwian, Frank Osahimwian, Rosemary Osahimwian, Julius Osahimwian, Ehis Ewemad, Augustine Osahimwian Ebowan, Osahimwian, Harrison Osahon-Best (my cousin) Osahon Darlison (my cousin) and Real prestige-my cousin you have all been very supportive.

I cannot fail to appreciate my spiritual father Pastor Lawson Ewere. Special thanks to my sponsor, friends and colleagues in the university who have acted as my brothers and sisters here in school. In no order of importance, I remember the names of those who made my life in the University of Benin worthwhile. Mr. Otasowie Odueki, Mr. Joseph Odigie, Chidera Jessica Iheze, Emmauel Ikuero Omoragbon, Fred Aigbedion, Israel Osamede, Okungbowa, Joel Chukwunenyne, Edobor Unity Eghianruwa, Daniel Orewa Omoruwou, Joesph Ehigiamusoe, Alexander Edobor, Precious Guobadia, Timothy Ugbogu, Agharuwa Kindness, Addison Emerald, Simon Bright, Simon Bright Ebovboumwan, Hope Elvis and O. Victory Ekinadose and many others I could not mention. Thanks for being there for me may God almighty bless you all.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Studies have shown that there remain only few landscapes on the Earth that is still in their natural state. Due to environmental changes, the Earth surface is being significantly altered in some manner and man's presence on the Earth and his use of land has had a profound effect upon the natural environment thus resulting into an accelerated growth in settlement expansion.¹ Settlements are products of human activities. It is on this backdrop, this study examines the trends in the development of Okokhuo town with case study of Ovia North East local government.

Ovia North East Local Government Area is in the south senatorial district of Edo. Its headquarters is Okada. It occupies a total land area of 2,301km² and a population of 153,849 (National Population Commission, 2006).² The area is lowland and rises up to about 100 metres above sea level. It falls within the rainforest zone with tall trees and oil palm trees and also possesses freshwater swamp forest. The vegetation favour the production of cereal crops like maize, tuber crops like cassava, tree crops like oil palm and fish farming.³ The major occupations of the people in the community are farming especially poultry and piggery, hunting, fishing, and trading. The major communities in the LGA are Okada, Uhen, Utese, Okokhuo, Uhiere, Isiuwa, Ekiadolor, Oluku, Iguoshodin, Utoke, Oghede, Egbeta, Ora, and Ogbese.⁴ Okokhuo Village is located in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria. It is among several

Villages in Ovia North East Local Government Area that have suffered continuous herders' attack resulting in loss of properties in recent times. Generally, Okokhuo people trace their origin back to Benin, Okokhuo people according to oral tradition is one of the Edo speaking groups involved in the exodus from the Benin about the ninth century, during the rule of Oba Ogiso. Political institution of Okokhuo refers to structures put in place to govern Okokhuo town during the pre-colonial period. The structures were traditionally organized and it recognized the historical circumstances of the people. According to Easton, political institution is the embodiment of that sub-system of the social system which deals with authoritative allocation of values to the society. Therefore, political institution involves political structures, political roles performed by actors or agents, patterns of interaction between actors, whether individuals or collectivities and a political process.⁹

Moreover, the political institution of Okokhuo town revolved round a system of traditional governmental system in which the family, extended family and the village, where hierarchically structured under a gerontocratic system, that is rule by the oldest male member of the society. At all levels of government, from the smallest unit (family) to the highest level (village), the structure composition and functions were the same, except that the Oba was the supreme authority of government that could legislate on all matters including death penalty. From the origin to the 2000s, Okokhuo town have developed tremendously both political, economically, agricultural and socially. These occur as products of a trend of activities in the village and Benin Kingdom.

Statement of the Problem

It is also the focus of the research work to make enquiry into important aspect of agriculture, production and trade. For instance the study examines land tenure system, otherwise called the method of land ownership and acquisition. How the people acquire the land for farming and farming method in the area. The production of indigenous industries also revolved round local labor and traditional division of labor which the people adopted. Also examined are the nature and structure of internal trade, and organization of external trade between the people of Okokhuo town and its neighbors.

Therefore the main thrust behind the work, is, in the area of agriculture and to examine the rationale of traditional effort in that direction. The study looks into patterns of land preparation and how farmers respond to the various seasons with suitable crops. Importantly, how labor was acquired, either family labour or paid labour or rotational group mobile labor that moved from one farm to another. It is important to examine the pattern of indigenous industrial production and traditional technology which made it to stand the test of time. Okokhuo people employed great deal of scientific, technological and technical skills in indigenous manufacturing which the work tries to unearth. More so, the elaborate internal and external trade networks encouraged in no small way inter-ethnic relation, because, it is a function of nature that every community is differently endowed, hence inter- group co-operation and exchanges which trade provides.

Importantly, the work examines the impact of these economic activities on Okokhuo people, showing its strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, the research work

revolves round the fact that, though with some constraints, economic activities in Okokhuo town were well managed and elaborate, as it served the people well by helping to keep them united, stable and creating a sort of prosperity that made Okokhuo a remarkable Ovia North East community that inspired her neighbors.

Aim and Objectives

The main objective of this study is to investigate on the socio-economic and cultural trends in the development of Okokhuo town in Ovia North East; while the objectives includes

- i. To describe the geography and people of Okokhuo people in Ovia North East LGA.
- ii. To examine identify the factors or contributing to the facilitating, development in Okokhuo town in Ovia North East LGA.
- iii. Examining the role of in Ovia North East Local Government in improving the standard of living of people Okokhuo town through health and educational facilities.
- iv. To examine the social amenities like roads and electricity development in Okokhuo town in Ovia North East LGA.
- v. To examine the extent to which in Ovia North East local Government implements Socio-economic programmes designed to alleviate the backward condition of the Okokhuo people.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study tends to treat both the theoretical and practical importance. Theoretically, this study will add to the already existing knowledge of the socio-economic and cultural factors in promoting rural development in Okokhuo town in Ovia North East LGA. The study was written in order to know the problems of the rural people and at the same time proffer solutions to them. More so, the study will be a guide to future researchers in their research in knowing the socio-economic factors in promoting rural development.

Practically, this research work will enable the rural dwellers to know the importance of harnessing the available rich natural resources in their localities in order to bring about development in their areas. This can be done by making sure that the various natural resources in the rural areas are well managed, through their efforts and efforts of the government. This study will also make them to put in agenda the issues concerning rural development, more especially on the areas of infrastructures, such as good roads, electricity, portable water, health centres, and transportation.

Scope of the Study

The study focus on the socio-economic development in Okokhuo town from earliest time to 2000AD. In the course of this work, attempt will be made to look at rural development in Okokhuo town and their settlement pattern. Thereafter, their various socio-economic activities will be reviewed. The work looks into the organization of

farming, hunting, fishing, trade and local industry. The instrument used for the aforementioned activities will be highlighted.

Methodology

The study will be drive from both primary and secondary source.

Primary Sources: The two major primary sources that make of this study are from Okokhuo town in Ovia North East government personnel and employee and traders of some of small medium enterprises base in Okokhuo town in Ovia North East LGA. Also Interviews will be carryout with both academic and non-academic historians.

Secondary Sources: Secondary sources will also be consulted during this study and they include: textbooks, journals, as well as other documented materials that help this study.

Literature Review

A number of sources were available on the subject matter of this research. These sources both articles and books are arranged in order of relevance

J. Ahmadu and O. T. Okoror, work titled “Analysis of Food Security Status of Farmers in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria,”¹⁰ assesses the food security status of farmers in Ovia North-East Local Government Area of Edo State The farmers' average per capita calorie food intake was 1923.55kcal which is lower than the FAO recommended per capita food consumption of 2700kcal. Consequently, majority (86%) of them were food insecure. The logit regression result showed that age, sex and household size had negative and significant influence on the food security status of the farmers while income from farming had positive and significant effect. The author

recommended that since farm income had significant and positive effect on food security, farmers should increase the proportion of their income allocated for food expenditure so as to decrease food insecurity.¹¹

S.O. Konkwo and A.A. Dickson, “Marketing Information Sources Amongst Oil Palm Fresh Fruit Bunch Processors in Ovia Northeast Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria,”¹² The author assesses marketing information sources among fresh fruit bunch (FFB) processors in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria. The author found that the most available marketing information to the respondents were information on where to sell FFB products, when to sell finished products and current market price of products based on the 97.5% respective response distribution on the variable. The author concluded that the major source of marketing information to the respondents was through phone calls that were made directly to retailers/dealers of processed products. The need for initial identification of information sources available to end users was strongly recommended by the work before the actual dissemination of relevant information in order to ensure wider coverage and timely reception.¹³

P. E. Ojo and M.O Ekun, in their work titled “Population Estimation of Ovia North-East Local Government Area using Geographic Information System (GIS) and Remote Sensing,”¹⁴ The author was done to carry out the population estimation of Ovia North-East Local Government Area in Edo State, Nigeria, using GIS and remote sensing techniques. The results of this work demonstrate that the use of GIS and remote sensing techniques, in conjunction with ancillary data, can improve the accuracy of population

estimates and provide a more comprehensive understanding of population distribution. The resulting population estimates and maps will provide valuable information for planning and resource management in the Ovia North-East Local Government Area and other tiers of Government such as the State and Federal Government respectively. It will also make it possible for policy makers to have a better understanding of the spatial distribution of the population within the study areas, and to identify areas that may be in need of additional resources or support.¹⁵

A. Rawlings work titled “Impact of Urbanizing Ovia-North East on the Quality of Groundwater using Water Quality Index,”¹⁶ posits due to increasing population and industrialization in urban areas, the environment has become so vulnerable as a result of unhygienic practise by the populace (particularly in developing country). Thus, making groundwater to be more vulnerable to pollutants from the environment. In the work, groundwater samples were collected from twelve different boreholes (six domestic boreholes and six bakery boreholes) in Ovia North-East Local Government Areas and assessed for their suitability in domestic and industrial purposes.¹⁷

Oghenero Joseph Ovhache, article titled “Socioeconomic Determinants of Plantain Production in Ovia North East Local Government Area in Edo State,”¹⁸ The author centered on socio-economic determinants of plantain production in Ovia North East of Edo State, Nigeria. The author was conducted to update existing literature on the plantain production enterprise. The author revealed that 85% of the farmers practiced bush burning. The regression result revealed that R^2 was 0.81 which implies

that over 80% of the changes in number of local technologies adopted by the plantain farmers were determined by the independent variable. Some variable like education, farm income and local knowledge in plantain production were significant. Among others, the later recommended that plantain farmers should be assisted with technologies where there are gaps as in staking, irrigation and wind-break erection in plantain production.¹⁹

Joseph Edono Unufe, work titled “The Perception of Ovia-North East Local Government Area Edo State on N-Power Programme and Its Relevance in Economic Development in Nigeria,”²⁰ examines the perception N-power programme on poverty eradication in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State. The author further revealed that N-power programmes have impacted youth empowerment in Ovia North-East LGA of Edo State and that N-power programmes have not impacted poverty alleviation in Ovia North-East LGA of Edo State. The author also recommended that the Economic policies of governments should be geared towards the creation of jobs; there is the need for an agreed poverty reduction agenda that can be used by all stakeholders be it Federal Government, State Government, Local Governments, NGOs, and the International Donor Community; it is recommended that apprenticeship be integrated into the formal school system so that upon leaving secondary school, students/trainees would have already acquired basic skills in their chosen vocations. This no doubt would increase their access to more vocational training; government should encourage the strengthening of the capability for unemployed rural and urban dwellers. Since unemployed people

constitute an increasing portion of the rural dwellers, economic policies should aim at enhancing their youth empowerment and poverty alleviation in Nigeria as a whole; government and the stakeholders should increase the opportunities for empowerment. There should be an increase of opportunities for continued participation of both urban and rural unemployed persons in productive work, and the authorities concerned should promote rural development through N-Power programmes. Integrated rural development is seen as the key to alleviating the poverty of the rural dwellers that constitute the greater chunk of the population.²¹

Olowo Banmeke and Muyewa Temitope Ajayi, “Activities of Women in Home Gardening in Ovia North-East Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria,”²² The study investigated the activities of women in home gardening in Ovia North-East L.G.A. of Edo state. A total of 80 respondents were sampled using the snowball sampling technique. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, means and chi-square analysis. They recommended that more women should be encouraged to establish home gardens around their house, and those that already do should be reached with extension services on how to tackle problems such as pest and disease infestations.²³

Ebinum, Udoka Stanley, Akamagune, Nelly Emmanuel in their work “The Relationship Between School Distance And Academic Achievement Of Primary School Pupils In Ovia North East, Edo State, Nigeria,”²⁴ they did an investigation on the relationship between school distance and academic achievement of primary school pupils in Ovia North-East LGA. As a guide: to the article, four research questions as well as

three hypotheses were tested ‘the correlation research design was adopted for the article. The population of the article comprised all primary schools in Ovia North-East LGA and there are one hundred and one primary schools out of which twenty schools (20%) were sampled using the random sampling technique and one hundred teachers were used as sample for the study.²⁵

According to Igbinidu Osayande, work titled “*Cost Efficiency of Maize Production in Ovia North East Area of Edo State, Nigeria,*”²⁶ The author examines empirically cost efficiency production in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State using farm-level data with a view to analyse the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, estimate the efficiency of resource allocation of yam farmers in the study area: A two-stage sampling technique was used to collect data from 100 maize farmers with the use of a well-structured questionnaire.²⁷

O. Idiake-Ochei, Andy. Omoregbee, “*Awareness and Preferred Sources of Information 1- on Improved Farm Practices by Small Scale Cassava Farmers in Ovia North East Local Government Area, Edo State,*”²⁸ The authors did an assessment on the, awareness and preferred sources of information on improved farm practices by small scale cassava farmers in Ovia North East Local Government Area, in Edo State. Specifically, he assessed the level of awareness, sources / channels of information, and preferred channels.²⁹

Favour Osazuwa, in his work titled “*Causes and Effects of Malnutrition in Children in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State,*”³⁰ The author

investigated the causes and effects of malnutrition in children in Ovia North East Local Government Area, using mothers and health workers as population target. Investigation revealed that malnutrition exist amongst children in Ovia North East Local Government Area and it occurs as ‘a result of ignorance. In conclusion, his suggestion was based on the findings; malnutrition has got its root cause from ignorance and poverty. Poverty alleviation is an area the government should show more interest in.³¹

Jide Ibietan in his work “*The Role of Local Government in Rural Development Issues*,”³² the author highlights the role of local government (being the closest tier of government to the grassroots) in rural development. The author later posits that the Nigerian political arrangement negates the essence of federalism (which is decentralization) by being highly centralized. The fiscal practices grossly skewed in favour of the central government couple with lack, of accountability among the governing elites conjoin to thwart efforts at meaningful development in the third tier of governance. The author is made up of Abstract; ‘Introduction; Conceptual Clarification; Self-help as an issue in rural development; Nexus between local government and Rural Development; Approaches to Rural Development, Conclusion and Recommendations. ‘It concluded that local governments have not been able to play their constitutional roles, let alone making attempts at rural development due in the main to the fact that they have been emasculated by other tiers of government. He suggested the Integrated Rural Development (IRD) approach in view of its comprehensiveness for sustainable rural development.³³

From the outflow of literature it is obvious that none of the few existing works to the knowledge of the researcher have had substantial discussion on the subject of this study. Therefore, apart from the main purpose of contributing to the literature on trends in the development of town historical studies, this work would also serve as a source material on the issue of the socio-economic and cultural trends in the development of Okokhuo town in Ovia North East and help to project a better understanding of promoting rural development in Okokhuo town in Ovia North East LGA.

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CHAPTER TWO

BRIEF HISTORY OF OKOKHUO PEOPLE

Geography and Origin of Okokhuo Town

Okokhuo is situated in Iyekuselu District Council Area of old Benin Division of Western Region, Nigeria. It is now part of Ovia North-East Local Government Area of Edo State of Nigeria. Okokhuo is eighteen (18) miles or about thirty (30) kilometers from Benin City. Okokhuo can be accessed through Ekiadolor, Benin-Lagos Road and through Oluku-Akure Road from Evboneka or Uwan, via Nigerian Institute of Oil Palm Research (NIFOR) which is Isiuwa Community.¹ It has common boundries with Ema village to the West from Okhuo stream to be source of Oroghomi stream through to the source of Obue stream and extends to Okporo stream and to Ofitebe stream in the North-West. Also in the South, along Okhuo stream from Ovbioba camp, which is where her boundry with Ema began, and through what is now called Omosigho camp by the East and curved to Ofitebe stream to the North-East.²

Origin of Okokhuo Town

Igbedion is a son of Aimiehino of Uwan. He was a brave man and took hunting as an added occupation to farming. This hunting skill aided him to great extent in his military service to Benin Kingdom.³ He was a notable warrior. One day, Igbedion's hunting occupation took him to Okhuo stream. He walked along the bank of this stream downward, which is the direction it flows. He found a natural stone bridge and he crossed over to the other bank. Igbedion combed the area but found no inhabitants. He became

attracted to the beautiful forest land.⁴ In his next hunting trip to the new land Igbedion decided to build a small house on one spot where the stream makes great noise. The sound so made by the stream is called gbudu-gbudu, a nick-name given to Egbokhuo (Okhuo waterside) by its foreign inhabitants. This was Igbedion's first base where he stayed for about three years. His stay here was short because of termite attack on his crops. Particularly yam.⁵ Further exploration of the land brought him to a table land which he relocated to and made a large farm, built a fine hut and stayed. After another three years, he deemed it fit to invite his bosom friend Osayamwen to cohabit with him. He told him "I have found a fertile and suitable land for farming come and join me." As he was no longer alone, they both put Okokhuo on the pedestal with Iwowo Street.⁶

Socio-Political Background of Okokhuo

Pre-colonial Okokhuo socio-political organization which is centralized is characterized by the special position occupied by the Enogie who is the authority in both the religious and civil sphere of the community. This special position of the Enogie is evident in the separation of his residence from the rest of the town.⁷ The monarchy as a matter of fact is as old as the community itself and is held in high esteem by both the Bini people and their contemporaries and is also recognized as one of the oldest in the world.⁸

An evaluation of the socio-political system of Benin will help appreciate the nature of the society during the pre-colonial times. However, the main focus of the socio-political affairs was centered on the activities of the Enogie and his cabinet of chiefs.⁹

Family/Kinship

The family is the smallest unit of Okokhuo society. This is where the early education of an individual begins. Different families vary in size, (numbers). Bradbury listed three types of families in Okokhuo viz: Nuclear or compound family, the Joint family and the Extended family.¹⁸ The nuclear or compound family consists of a man who is the father (*Erha*), his wife/wives (*Iye*) and the children (*Emo*).¹⁰

The joint family consists of a man, his wife/wives, his unmarried children and in addition to them their married sons and their wives and children. The extended family comprises of a man, his wife/wives and children together with his brothers, their wives and children and in some cases, the unmarried sons and daughters of a deceased elder brother. Thus various categories of families could be added to by widowed parents, sister or daughter or any member of their kin, slaves or servants.¹¹ As the family grows larger they form kinship ties and each father represents his own home (*Owa*) and the eldest father is given the title Okaegbe.¹⁹ Although the family is the smallest unit of the society, it is as well the most basic unit of socio-political structure of the society. According to Dmitri M. Bondarenko, "The extended family community was the premodial, substratum, socio-political institution of the Edo."¹² As earlier mentioned, the family/home is where the early education of an individual begins.

The Nuclear Family and Extended Family System of Okokhuo People

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Although the family is the smallest unit of the society, it is as well the most basic unit of socio-political structure of the society. According to Dmitri M. Bondarenko, "The extended family community was the premodial, substratum, socio-political institution of the Edo."¹⁵ As earlier mentioned, the family/home is where the early education of an individual begins.

Age Grade System

This is an important aspect of the village organization. It is a system of stratification of all men in the village. Every man in a Benin village at one point of his life must belong to an age grade group which they call "Otu". The age grade system is divided into three groups. They are; the Iroghae, Ighele and Edion.¹⁶

Iroghae: This is made up of young men from their teens to late twenties. They do the lighter jobs. Some of their duties include; clearing bush paths to farms, streams and markets. They also carryout repairs on public buildings, market places, shrines and so on.

Ighele: These are the older male usually between the age of thirty and forty-five or fifty. They carryout the heavier and more skillful tasks like felling of large trees, building houses and so on. They could also be assisted by the Iroghae.¹⁷ They also serve as the executive arm of the village administrative council. They also serve as security for their communities and some of them are also recruited for the army.

Edion: Those in this age group form the council of elders or the village administrative council. They are led by the oldest man in the village, Odionwere. The Edion are exempted from communal labour. However, they could voluntarily support. Although it is their duty to supervise the operations of the Ighele and the Iroghae. The Edion together with the Odionwere and the community head- Enogie constitute the administrative and judicial council for the village. A man cannot join the Edion while his father is still alive. This is because to the Edos, he is still under the authority of his father who represents him and other dependants in the village council. Therefore a man could remain in the Ighele group for as long as the age of sixty to seventy as the case may be, only if his father is still alive.¹⁸

The only condition is that such a person is exempted from the difficult task carried out by the Ighele group for example, military duties. He could also accompany his father to Edion meetings but cannot participate in deliberations. In some villages however,

these classes of individuals are put in different categories. That is they stand in an intermediate position between the Ighele and Edion hence they are called Edionnikoto (the lower Edion).¹⁹ There are also cases whereby a son can deputize for his father especially when his father is too old and weak to be present at meetings.

Pre-Colonial Education

In the pre-colonial Benin society, just like every other pre-colonial society in Nigeria, there existed no formal form of education whereby school houses were built for the purpose of learning. Rather, what existed was an informal form of education. This is the form of education one acquires from parents, family members, community and the local environment.²⁰ Children learn from their parents/guardians and relatives by observing and helping out in whatever vocation they are engaged in. Hence on most occasions the females tend to learn whatever trade their mothers are involved in while the male children learn that of their fathers. It is in this process they get to learn about their culture and customs, their history (through oral tradition, as there was no form of reading and writing), songs, feables, traditions and so on. The child grows up and is incorporated into the society. For the male children, they are meant to join the age grade group where they get to learn more about their community and what is expected of them in the society. For instance, those that have come of age and are strong enough, get to join the army.²¹

Education in pre-colonial Benin society as it was for most pre-colonial African society was all encompassing. It was geared towards preparing an individual intellectually, vocationally as well as militarily in order to make meaningful impact in the

society. The major emphasis of this education was the social responsibility, job orientation, political participation and spiritual/moral values of the individual.²² The intellectual aspect of pre-colonial education involves acquiring knowledge about the culture and customs of the people, their traditions, legends, proverbs, the environment, poetry and so on. The vocational aspect involves farming, fishing, weaving, knitting, carving, blacksmithing, pottery, etc.

The different guilds In Benin also present a platform for individuals to be trained into professionals in different fields. There were guilds for cavers, brass workers, blacksmiths, weavers, workers in ivory, iron, leathers and so on. There are also those who are dancers, drummers, butchers, priests and diviners.²³ The guilds were almost a family affair just as like the palace associations, whereby membership is based on transfer from father to children. In some cases a man could send some his children to his wife's guild and such children, when they come of age also send some their own children to their father's guild. That way, children are trained to become professionals in different vocations to serve the Oba and their community at large. Therefore, three important institutions through which an individual is trained and educated are; the family, the guild system and the age-grade system.²⁴

The Family

As earlier stated, the family is the place where early education of an individual begins. It was the responsibility of a parent or guardian to teach their children moral and cultural values. Children learnt basic things about their culture and history from their

parents or guardians. Often times, the intellectual aspects of pre-colonial education were carried out by parents. This intellectual aspects includes; the history of the people which is oftentimes passed on through oral tradition, a system whereby the younger ones are told their history by the older ones usually as stories, folktales, in form of songs, poetry, riddles and so on.²⁵

These children in turn pass it on to the generation after them. Oral tradition was one of the major means through which African history was preserved, as there was no form of writing through which the earliest historical events could be documented. Also in the family, children get to learn basic aspects of their culture, oftentimes they learn this by joining or assisting their parents and older ones in carrying out or observing traditional rites and festivals. For example, the Ugie-Ewere, a ceremony which takes place annually as part the Igwe(New year) festival rites. Very early on the morning of Ugie-Ewere, just before dawn, children take burning brands from the fire to chase all evil spirits out of the city to the junctions or roads leading out of the town.²⁶ Thereafter, they gather "Ebe-Ewere" (leaves of joy) which they present to their parents and adults from house to house amidst singing and dancing. This ceremony was passed on from one generation to another and children learnt things from their parents and elder ones. Also as part of Ugie-Ewere, parents usually cut a piece of the "Ebe-Ewere" and stick it to their foreheads and that of everyone in their household, that way the younger ones automatically learn how to celebrate Ugie-Ewere.²⁷

Children are also taught morals by their parents and older ones as part of educating them, the male children usually learnt the trade of their fathers while the females learnt from their mothers. They are also being educated on their social responsibilities as an individual. The female children learnt how to cook and take care of the home which is seen as strictly a woman's duty. The home was about the only place she could learn that, and any grown woman that could not cook was always seen as not well trained. Basically, children learnt from their family members by observation and assisting them on whatever they are involved in. The family prepares an individual to fit, as well as function well in the larger society.²⁸

Marriage Institution

Another institution to be considered under the pre-colonial social system in Benin is the practice of marriage. Generally, in the traditional African society, marriage was polygamous in nature and those who have more than one wife were classified as wealthy people in the society and this is applicable in Benin. In this institution, the woman was seen to belong to her father before marriage, but when it is time for her to get married in Benin tradition she becomes the property of her husband. The aim of marriage is known traditionally for procreation and provision of financial security to the woman. The husband is expected to look over the entire family and support the wife throughout her life. Marriage is seen as a compulsory phase for a woman in Benin because a woman being single at a ripe age is frowned at; being married uplifted the status of women in pre-colonial societies. In the community, amongst the people of Benin marriage was

contracted in accordance with the native law and customs, there were initially six ways by which a man could get married to a woman in pre-colonial Benin; Betrothal (Ebee), Dowry (Egho), Pawning (Iregbe-Iyaha), Seizure (Ba-Igben), Home wife (Areobhua) and Inheritance (Egbase) but only three of these systems survived; Betrothal, Dowry and Inheritance.²⁹

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CHAPTER THREE
SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRENDS OF DEVELOPMENT OKOKHUO TOWN
IN OVIA NORTH EAST LGA

Introduction

Over time, there had been history of population drift of one place to the other. This drift could be internal or external movement and in most cases is attracted by socio-economic factors. In Nigeria and other West African countries however, movement of farmers between rural areas, or rural-rural is equally very significant and important. However, whether in rural-urban, rural-rural, or (in rare cases) urban-rural movement of people, population drift is basically a reflection of the imbalance in opportunities and life chances which exist between places. It is against this backdrop, this chapter examines the socio-economic trends of development Okokhuo town in Ovia.

Socio-Cultural Practices of Okokhuo People

The social institutions of Okokhuo comprises of the totality of the people's way of life i.e. their birth, naming, burial, eating, and dressing, marriage, religion, Justice system, moral values and etiquette, festival, dance, musical instruments etc. are all part of the social structure.¹ The homogeneity and characteristics of the Okokhuo people has been described by Igbafe, according to him, "the key to a people's character or personality can be found in their music, dances, folklore and dressing".² The culture of the Okokhuo people is an integral part of the Okokhuo town especially with regards to the question of the Okokhuo historical consciousness. The Okokhuo people have a rich heritage; Okokhuo culture is significant because besides revealing much about the kind of

people they are, they also say much of the people's past and in some cases mark a deliberate attempt to preserve the past in human history. This does not remove the fact that there are variations in cultural practices as we move from kingdom to kingdom in Okokhuo town.³

In pre-colonial Okokhuo town, there were different social activities practiced among the people, these social activities include: Child birth, burial-rites, marriage, method of inheritance, religion, festivals, language, music, folktales and folklores.⁴ The common tongue is Bini, though Bini is spoken all over the land but there are slight variations in the different clans of division but such local linguistic differences do not create language barrier because they are mostly lexical and sometimes tonal which obviously is not enough to impair mutual intelligibility.⁵ The beliefs and customs of Okokhuo go hand in hand and quite often they are difficult to separate, they cover nearly all areas of life. Beliefs in a general sense deals with religious ideas, while customs are concerned with what people generally approve or disapprove of and do.⁶

Birth: In every society the birth of a child is always a great celebration because it is believed that children are blessings from the gods and with marriage women have an obligation to bear children and if a woman does not bear children, traditionally the society blames her. Therefore child birth was a great deal for a woman and the society that is why the pre-colonial Okokhuo people also had the child birth and naming of the child as a ceremony in the community. This system was related to the woman, whom after three months of delivery makes a peculiar hairstyle called Eto-Omo, after Ihoetoa

(hair washing) ceremony then the naming ceremony. There was a ceremony of hair washing that was performed, at this ceremony the ETO OMO which is plaited for fourteen days, was done by the pregnant women before delivery.⁷ Also, the hairstyle was done by women that were ready for the child naming ceremony. This hairstyle was done with EKASA (yellow native soap) and was ceremoniously washed and it was women affair. However, during the naming ceremony of a child, it was unusual for a man to think up a name before the child was born except in cases where the native doctor had already warned the parents that the name of the person who reincarnated must be given to the new born. The Okokhuo people in the pre-colonial period were firm believers in reincarnation. At the ceremony, the baby is taken to the most senior man in the gathering who throws the baby up and in the process gives him or her name.⁸

Burial Ceremonies and Rites: Another event that was a socialized practice in pre-colonial Okokhuo town was the burying of the dead. The burial rites varied due to the age of the dead person. There was the tradition of Okokhuo that when a woman loses her husband among other rites, must sleep on the floor for seven days. On the seventh day, it is expected of her to trek into the thick forest as early as four o'clock in the morning and it is quite known that if any evil befell her, she was seen as responsible for her husband's death and if she came back successfully she was seen as a free woman.⁹ The widow usually receives nothing from her husband's property but if she has children she can share with them. When it is a man that died, the whole village mourns him for the customary seven days and abstinence from their usual farm work, dances and merriment.

On the death of a child, a few people usually from the UENLEN went to bury the child inside a bush. Mourning was limited to the immediate relatives. If, a young man who died was buried by the EGBONUGHERE and the IGENE with no formalities, he was buried naked. When an elderly man with children and grandchildren died, he will be buried with much feasting and the least sign of mourning. The corpse will be buried immediately without delay before the women in the harem are informed. In pre-colonial Okokhuo, married women's corpses were returned to their families for burial.¹⁰

Festivals: As a matter of fact, the celebration of certain festivals was a conscious feature of Okokhuo town. People celebrate festivals to remember, commemorate or mark certain events that have historical or social relevance in their lives.¹¹ The festivals celebrated by Okokhuo people include the following: Utese festival usually celebrated in February, New Year festival, once in eight years and Ugie festival, celebrated in September. However, the significance or reason for celebrating these festivals is that most festivals are organized in honor of the kingdom's deity as a sign of thanksgiving to the deity believed to have protected and blessed the inhabitants. Significance is that it is an avenue to implore the deity to sustain the previous blessings and protection and ask for more in the future.¹² It also has a social significance because it creates an avenue where sons and daughters staying away from home to come and join their kids and kin. Again, it preserves the cultural heritage of the people. It also creates an avenue where people stay at home, rest and relax after the year struggle and labour. The importance of these celebrations is that apart from fostering unity and making people to remember and

cherish the past, it fostered inter group relations, as Okokhuo neighbors participated in the celebration.¹³

Religion: Religion is a very important aspect in every society because it helps to regulate behavior by teaching specific rules, laws and morals to guide the people. The Okokhuo culture is tied up with ancestral worship. The Okokhuo people are polytheists, believing in the gods and goddesses of the things in their environments, but they also believe in a Supreme Being called Osanobulua (God). Examples of their deities are; Olokun, Eshu (the Okokhuo trickster god), this god is shared by Yoruba and Edo myth. The name 'eshu' was used as a translation for satan by Christian Missionaries, Osun (divinity of medicine), Ayanto (goddess of earth), goddess of health, goddess of the lake and fertility.¹⁴ The religions of many Nigerian societies recognized the social importance of women by emphasizing the place of female gods of fertility and social peace, but women were also associated with witchcraft which appeared to symbolize the potential social danger of women exercising power uncontrolled by men. Also there are deified divinities in Benin, some of the deities were queens and princesses, the Esan people are known for their hero worshipping, deities like: Uda the Great, Agba n' Ojie, Ohie of Ebhoyi, Egbelle, Ojobhonti of Efanduon of Uromi and Unea, they are seen by the Esan people as intermediaries between God and man. Therefore, ancestral worship as a part of their belief and religion played a great part in the moulding of the Okokhuo custom, moral code and the general law of ordered life.¹⁵

Circumcision and Puberty Rites

These are other social activities in Okokhuo town. It is of great importance which is full of ceremonies. For the male children, eight days after birth they were usually circumcised. This involves the cutting foreskin of the male penis at birth to ensure enjoyable sex and avoiding diseases from hiding inside the thick coating of the pennies.¹⁶ For the girls, puberty rites were of highest importance. This was so because, without performing the circumcision, the girl remained a girl for life, never attaining the status and privileges of womanhood.¹⁷

Moonlight Tales

This is another social activity in Okokhuo town. Moonlight tales and plays are popular ways of entertainment and education. Adults and children assemble to listen to folktales told by parent and elders. The tales may be short moral which tortoise, the greedy and cunning hero suffers, or they may be long tales of adventures and exploits by hunters and other beings who venture into a dangerous forests inhabited by terrible beasts and spirit animals. Although these tales appear very imaginative, and fantastic, they reflect the history and moral value of the people.¹⁸

Agricultural Practices in Okokhuo Town

Agriculture in Okokhuo town was embodiment of two main activities: arable farming for crop production, which includes: food crops production and cash crop production. Food crops were directly for subsistence , and it included crops , such as , vegetables , local beans , plantain , yam , maize , while ,cash crops included crops , such

as palm tree , economics trees , such as iroko, mahogary and obeche, groundnut and cotton. On the other hand animal husbandry was associated with rearing of domestic and wild animals, such as goat and grass-cutters, respectively. Local fishing was also a part of animal husbandry.¹⁹

Importance of Agriculture to Okokhuo People

In the pre-colonial period, almost every society was directly or indirectly involved in agricultural activities. Agriculture, which is defined as the science of crop production and animal husbandry, was the pre-requisite for industrialization hence, most people in it. One of the importance of agriculture in Okokhuo town was provision of food, rural employment and rural revenue .it was the source of food for the entire population at a time, internationally trade was either impossible or restricted coastal states. Outside food, no society could survive and it was from agriculture that food was obtained.²⁰

However, agriculture was a veritable source of rural employment and revenue. A very large proportion of Okokhuo people were directly involved in agriculture, and this was a source of employment as the people found something to do to earn a living. Rural revenue which aptly was rural income, whether it was through barter or commodity money was made possible by agriculture. People earn income either from their farms of by working for people who engaged them. As a result, people could effectively transact, that is, use what they have to obtain what they do not have.²¹

Furthermore, through agriculture, Okokhuo people could get the required raw material for their indigenous industries. Without raw materials, no industries could thrive.

For instance, Eyiye states that, the foam mattress industry uses cotton as raw materials. For instance, certain indigenous industries in Okokhuo use raw materials made available by agriculture. For example, the locally – made cloths in Okokhuo used cotton- an agricultural cash crops, also is also the raw material for local soap and pomade were palm- oil and palm-kernel, gotten from palm- tree an agricultural cash crop.²²

Meanwhile, there is a direct link between agricultural development and industrialization, According to Ewe Udu, agriculture provides a market for industrial output. As agriculture develops and their income increase, farmers are able to purchase more industrial goods for their comfort and agricultural implements for more efficient production.²³ Similarly, in Okokhuo, agriculture made it possible for the local industries to thrive and grow. For instance, products of indigenous industries, which included soap, pomade, medicine, pottery, mat, were purchased with income realized from agriculture. Outside agricultural participation, nobody could have the income to patronize the products of rural industries.²⁴

Land Tenure, Acquisition, Labor and Land Preparation in Okokhuo Town

In pre-colonial Okokhuo, people did not just occupy any land for agricultural purposes. Traditionally, any Okokhuo person was entitled to piece of land for agricultural pursuit. Such a person must be a good and loyal member of the community where he resided, having respect for constituted authority. However, the power to allocate land for agricultural purposes was vested in the family as a socio-political unit. The entire land in Okokhuo first belonged to the different families in the various villages / towns that made

up the kingdom. To this end, the immediate power for land allocation was vested in the head of the family who was the custodian of the entire property of the family, including land. Once the land was allocated, the prospective farmer was now ready to carry out his legitimate agricultural activities.²⁵

However, in case the land seekers was a stranger living among Okokhuo people, and if his or her stay had not been legitimized in form of traditional naturalization, the procedure for land acquisition was different . Unlike a citizen of Okokhuo, who freely got a piece of land from his village, through the family head, the stranger would be required ton fulfill some traditional conditionality for land acquisition. These included payment for the land (mostly in kind, with agricultural items, such as yam or goat) and a requirement for compulsory labor in the village communal farm or a special service for the head of the kingdom.²⁶

On the other hand, agricultural labor in Okokhuo was a unique one, as it was both individually or communally acquired. Meanwhile, labor refers to effort which makes production possible. Land alone will not produce anything that can satisfy human wants. Man must work on the land before anything can be produced. The household and extended family was the dominant unit of labor in Okokhuo town. The family and the extended household was virile and dynamics and therefore, constituted a cheap and ready source of labor for agricultural activities. The centrality of labor in Okokhuo was so important that, as a result, there was the tendency for a man to marry many wives to secure enough children to be mobilized and deployed for agricultural functions.

Production costs, as a result were lower, when household labor was utilized and this was the main rationale behind family labor.²⁷

Closely allied to the issue of labor in Okokhuo was division of labor. Even though, labor was not totally skilled, household practiced division of labor, which created some form of specialization and gradually turned some people into skillful laborers, as they continually performed one task. According to Udam, division of labor leads to specialization of labor. This is because, division of labor means that the production of a commodity is split or divided into a number of separate processes and that each process is performed by a different man or different labor group.²⁸ For instance, in Okokhuo town, the production of a crop, like yam, could have processes, such as, land preparation, planting, harvesting and storage – these processes were performed by different persons. For example bush clearing and burning were done by men, while the women supported in harvesting by taken the yam to home or ban. This applied to almost every agricultural crop production.²⁹

Importantly, land preparation for farming was a critical process in Okokhuo town, as it determined the success or failure of the entire process. People did not just enter into any forest or farmland and started to plant, the land, having been acquired, must be prepared. This leads to the issue of agricultural seasons in Okokhuo town. The year was divided into two seasons on the basis of rainfall distribution. Two distinct seasons – the wet and dry seasons existed. The wet season began in about April and lasted till October. The rain-fall regime was double-peaked, the two periods of maximum rainfall were

separated by a relatively dry period in August known as August break (Owaren). The two periods of peak rainfall were April to July (evan) and September to October (ogwe). The onset of the wet season was usually marked by heavy down pours.³⁰ It was during the wet season that most agricultural activities took place in Okokhuo town.

Land preparation in Okokhuo usually began during planting season, especially during the wet season, as agricultural activities wound up during the dry season, except occasional harvest of crops. The first stage in land preparation was bush clearing, followed by burning the type of crop to be planted determined how the soil was prepared. For instance, yam and maize (corn) activated deep hole and shallow one respectively.³¹

Food Crop Production in Okokhuo Town

In Okokhuo town, food crop farming was a wide spread agricultural services activity, because every man or household was directly and indirectly involved in it. There was no household that abhorred food crop farming. Notable crops that featured prominently were yam, maize, vegetables, cassava, plantain, /banana, local beans, coco-yam and okro. Once the forest or bush had been cleared and burnt by men, planting was generally dominated by women, except yam that needed the physical exertion of men.¹⁸ Immediately after land preparation, planting commenced, in a system, described by Bradbusy as a mixed cropping that allows two or more crops to be planted on the same piece of land, whereby, each time of the planting year and are harvested accordingly.³²

However, planting was normally done in two periods of the year. The first was between late January and May, and the second between June and September. Certain

crops did well in certain period of the year .For instance; yam was usually planted in the first period, while maize could be planted in two periods. Likewise cassava, okro and maize, these could be planted in the two periods coco-yam and melon did well only when they were planted in the first planting period. During the dry season, between November and January, planting usually seized due to lack of moisture in the soil.³³

Industrial Developments

Attention now shifts to indigenous industrial activities in Okokhuo town. Okokhuo town was home to very elaborate industrial activities that encompassed veritable technological and scientific pursuits adopted by the people to solve their basic natural deficiencies to earn a decent living. The indigenous industrial activities covered areas, such as soap, and pomade making, extraction of oil from palm fruits, palm wine tapping, broom and basket making, wood carving and extraction of starch from cassava and garri- which started to feature prominently as an important staple on the eve of colonial rule.³⁴

Manufacturing Industries in Okokhuo Town (Pomade and Soap)

These were industries that were designed to produce consumable goods. Goods or products under this category were soap and pomade. These industries were mostly small domestic holdings, that is, each family or most families could produce them once the basic know-how had been acquired. Production was mostly small-scale, targeting, first, domestic consumption and sale of limited quantity in the market. Few people were involved in fairly large-scale production exclusively for local exchange.

Generally, the labor force for the production of these consumable items, were mostly drawn from the family, comprising almost everybody with each member performing the role in which he or she had comparative physical and technological advantage. At times, labor could be drawn from extended families, volunteers or daily paid arrangement-mostly in kind. But women featured more prominently than men in pre-colonial manufacturing industries in Okokhuo.³⁵ Children and men assisted at intervals especially when they are called upon to do so. The production of those industrial product are hereby discussed

Pomade

Two types of pomade were made in Okokhuo town that were very prevalent and general acceptable for their quality ,originality and affordability These were the kernel pomade, called “ori-ibi” and coconut pomade called “ori-kokodia.” For the kernel pomade the main raw material was the palm-kernel .the nutty part of the palm fruit or nuts. After the oil has been extracted from the palm nuts, the nuts were spread under the sun to dry for few days, after which they are packed into a sack or basket and they are kept in a dry place, mostly the kitchen to prepare the kernel pomade. The dry nuts were manually broken to extract the little black seed inside. After the cracking of the nuts- a process dominated by the women, the seed were kept in a specially designed pot or pan, the pot or pan would be placed on top of a mild fire for a few minutes while been covered.³⁶

However, the pot or pan would be brought down from fire and opened. An original scent zooms off the pot. While on fire, the kernel had released a cost of blackly liquid underneath the pot or pan. Then, the person overseeing the process (a woman almost in all cases), would remove the nearly chaffy black seeds, and only the blackly liquid would be left for a few minutes to be cold. Then a clean container was brought and the liquid was poured into it after a casual filtering. The liquid inside was called kernel pomade or ori-ibi in Urhobo. The ori-ibi was used for purpose, such as, rubbing on the body as cream after bathing, to cure cough or convulsion in children; or mixed with other things as a consumable concoction.³⁷

On the other hand, another pomade made by Okokhuo people was called “ Ori-kokodia” (coconut oil). The only raw- material used for making the coconut –oil was coconut. Coconut tree dotted the streets and compounds of pre-colonial Agbon people. The coconut trees were owned by the individuals and various household. A mature coconut was marked by distinct brown color. There were two ways of harvesting mature coconut: either by plucking it with hand (when the tree could be reached by hand or by using locally-made ropy leather or steps provided by the bamboo tree. After all the coconut had been assembled in a spot, the sponge like mass covering the main coconut would be removed with sharp implements to reveal the real nut, which was around in structure. The nut was also covered by an inner hard shell called “Kakagbosa” which would be removed. The kakagbosa when carefully removed, (without being broken) could be used as cup and containers).³⁸

However, the process of preparing coconut-oil entered a second stage when the coconut was cut into pieces and washed with water. The next stage was the grating stage, whereby a wood like implement, mostly a pestle was used to pound it until it was thoroughly pounded. Then water was poured into the pounded coconut, and immediately the real oil floated on top of the water. The floating oil was a thick liquid that separate itself from the water. The thick liquid would be removed from the surface of the water, leaving the water under. Then the liquid would be poured into a pot, specially designed for it and placed on top of fire for some minutes. It was while on fire that , the real coconut oil was noticed. When the pot was brought down, the oil would be seen on top of a thick layer of liquid in the pot. Then the oil would gradually be removed with a small cup or any spoon-like object, living the thick liquid at the bottom of the pot. The oil would be kept in a container.

The making of coconut-oil was a process in which both men and women participated, with the women playing more role. The role performed by men began with plucking the coconut from the tree and ended after the removal of the thick sponge-like body covering the nut. Then women took it from there until the process was completed. However, the coconut-oil served a number of purposes in Okokhuo town. This include, one , it was used for rubbing the body as cream after bath, two, it was *used to rub(massage)pregnant* women by local mid wives, three, it was drank by some people as a neutralizer for suspected poisonous intake and it was a dependable source of income, as it was highly valued by the people.³⁹

Soap

Soap making was another conspicuous industry in pre-colonial Okokhuo town. It was a manufacturing outfit solely master minded by the people in Okokhuo town it was usually a family or domestic affair, whereby, every member of the house hold participated by playing any role assigned, though, dominated by women. Soap making was a response to the bathing cleaning and hygienic needs of the people. The technology was simple and invented by the people as necessity demanded.

The raw materials used for soap making were part of the palm tree, especially the shaft of the bunch of palm nut, and certain local woods considered suitable. Nearly every other part of the palm tree could a raw material for the soap industry. Banana leaves and tress were also used. The first process in soap-making was the gathering of the raw materials when they are partially dry and then set them on fire. The fires gradually burn the materials for two to three days under a place of cover. After the burning, the ashes were collected and put in a basin of water, the water filtered through the suspended basket over a large basin. As the water filtered through the basket, black liquid steadily pour into the basin and when the ashes have been thoroughly filtered, the liquid was then poured into a large pot and the pot was then poured upon a huge fire with heavy furnace. The pot stayed on the fire until the filtered ash water boiled and evaporated. When it had become thick, considerable quality of palm-oil was added to it. Some people would prefer to add kernel oil. Weather palm oil or kernel oil, the ash water-turned solid would mix up with the oil to form very solid deposit.⁴⁰

Then the pot would be removed from the fire, and allowed to cool down. Having cooled down, the soap, usually black in color or brownish (depending whether kernel oil or palm-oil was used), would be cut into various shape. The soap was very good for bathing as it was believed to have some antiseptic quantities. Meanwhile, for households actively involved in the production of the soap, a regular source of income was guaranteed. Apart from the regular sale at the local markets, buyers trooped into the households of this local soap manufacturers to patronize them.⁴¹

Processing Industries in Okokhuo Town

Processing industries are concerned with empowering with improving the quality of primary products like ground-nuts, palm oil and kernels, cocoa, cotton and rubber. Not all these crops in products were produced in Okokhuo, not to talk about their processing. The pre-colonial industries in Okokhuo town were for limited numbers of primary products, of which palm nut processing for cooking oil and lubricating purposes was the most prominent. The two most important and most wide spread processing industries were those of palm oil and palm wine from either the raffia palms or the oil palm trees, which were accordingly tapped.⁴²

Palm-nut Processing

The most conspicuous processing industry in pre-colonial Okokhuo was the one for palm nut. Palm nut are gotten from oil palm trees which were extensively grown crops in Okokhuo town. Palm-oil was the major products of processed palm nut. The oil was naturally reddish, especially if the nuts were mature, good species and well

processed. The palm nuts producing industries in Okokhuo town were marked by three features: entirely dependently on household labor, the technology for the processing was entirely indigenous and a well lead down method of processing. The issue of the labor for the processing of oil palm into oil, began from the harvesting of the branches of palm-nuts a process performed by both men and women, with the men handling the most strenuous aspect of it, which is the bringing worn the bunches from the tree-top, while women assisted in gathering and haulage. Mature bunches or nuts were known or identified when they turned red in color. These were cut down and kept for say between two and four days.

Then the nuts would be well selected to avoid rotten ones or bad ones. At the end of the four days of fermentation, the seeds would have been soft enough to enhance easy processing. The good ripe nuts having been selected were thoroughly washed with clean water and placed inside a big cooking pot, specially designed for that purpose. The nuts were cooked for between two to four hours and one or two of the nuts would be used to test whether, the nuts were okay to be brought down from fire. If confirmed good enough, the pot would be brought down from the fire and all the nuts were kept in a square-shaped wooden trough, or inside a big mortar to be pounded. If kept in the wooden trough, which varied in sizes, from ten to twenty feet long, and from two to three feet deep, water was gradually poured into it and about two, three or more able bodied men (depending on the size of the trough) used their heels to press on the nuts. After the nut had been thoroughly squeezed of all the oil, the next stage of bringing out the oil followed.⁴³

However, if mortar was used, the nuts would be placed in the wooden mortar in batches, until all the nuts were processed. In that case, an able bodied man or men took their turn in pounding the nuts with a pestle until the process was confirmed complete. Whether the wooden trough or the mortar was used, the next stage after the pounding or squeezing of the nut was the removal of the oil. After the pounding, water was poured into the trough or the mortar and mixed with the nuts, some thick layers of oily liquid immediately settled at the top, leaving the water and the nuts under, then, gradually, all the thick liquid would be removed and put inside a pot. The floating oil was skimmed off the water for two or three times, depending on the thickness of the oil, fresh water was occasionally added. All the oil having been removed, and put inside a big pot, would be placed on top of fire. As the fire heated the pot, the oil was steered with a spatula, and in doing this, the real oil would float. When the pot was brought down, the floating oil was gradually filtered away and kept inside pots or well carved and designed calabash.⁴⁴

Closely allied to the processing, of palm-nuts for oil, was the processing of same nuts for kernel. After removing the oil, the nuts would be placed under the sun and steered from time to time for few days to dry. Depending on the intensity of the sun, the nuts could dry between seven to fourteen days. After the drying, the nuts are neatly packed into a place where they would not have any contact with water. From the spot, the nuts were cracked in batches until the cracking was completed. The cracking of the nuts was dominated by women and children. The seeds were used for making pomade. The shells of the cracked nut were used for fire, and could be burnt as raw-material for soap

making. Importantly, the oil and the kernel gotten from the palm-nuts were domestically consumed and the surplus sold in the market to earn money for the usual family transactions.⁴⁵

Palm-wine and Local Gin

These twin products were processed out of the oil palm tree, and their production was a universal one at Okokhuo town that is nearly everybody had one connection or another with its production or consumption. Raffia palms and also oil palm trees were tapped for wine at Okokhuo town. The raffia or palm was either felled or tapped while standing for wine. This was an occupation that was entirely dominated by men, with the women only performing occasionally assigned role of carriage or sales. To tap a standing raffia palm or oil palm tree, a long ladder made of strong ropes with a padded part for the feet was needed. Any other suitable object like a straight fell tree with branches that were alternated could be used. It could also be a locally constructed ladder held with ropes. Up there, a hole was made in the last shoot and a container mostly calabash was fixed into the hole and the wine gradually flowed into the calabash.⁴⁶ The tapper visited the palm, at least once or twice a day to ensure steady and uninterrupted flow of wine into the calabash. There were part-time and full-time tappers at Okokhuo town.

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CHAPTER FOUR

CONTRIBUTIONS OF EDO STATE AND OVIA L.G.A TO THE SOCIO- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF OKOKHUO TOWN

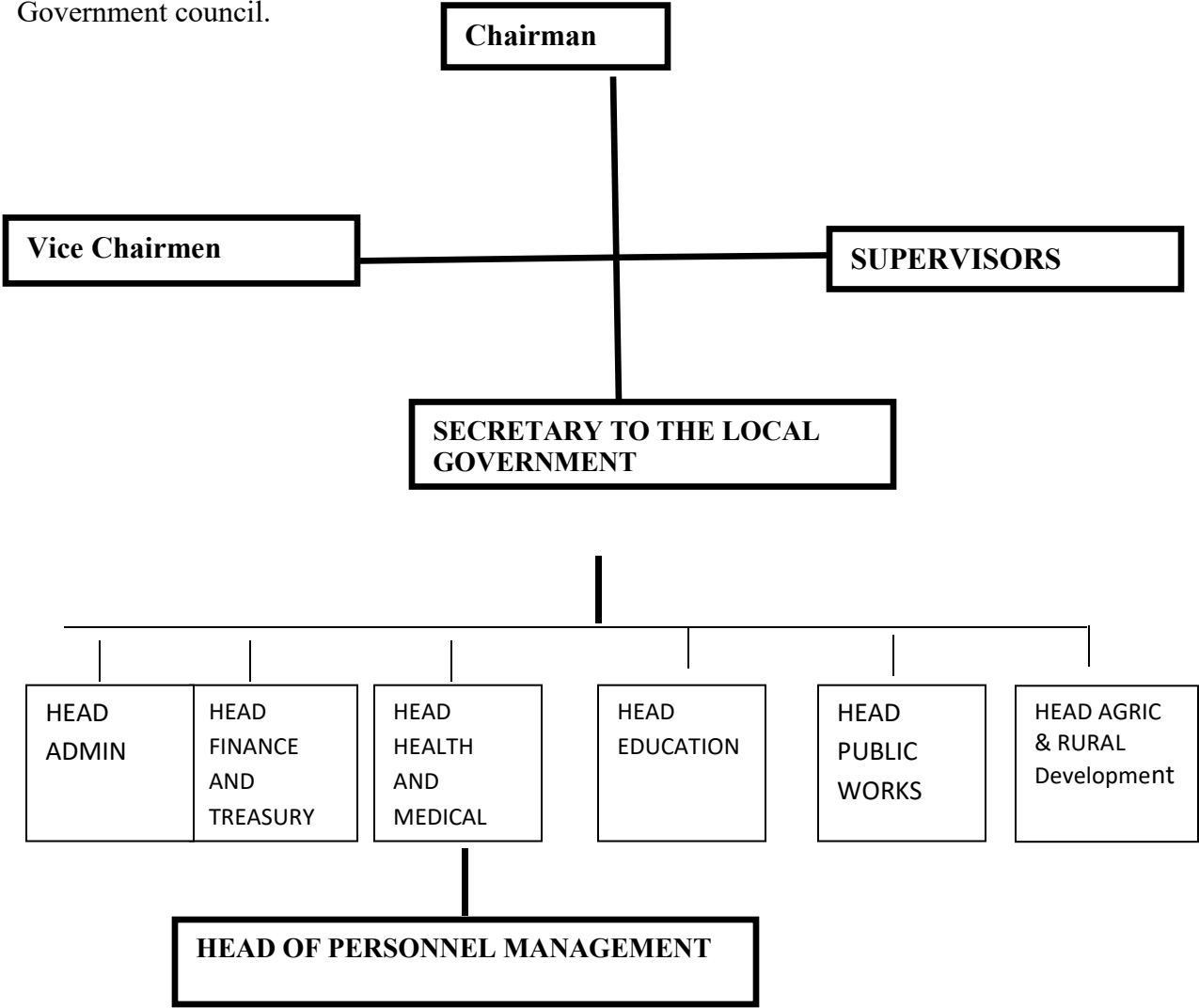
Introduction

This chapter assesses the impact of Ovia North East local government on the development of Okokhuo town. The assessment is strictly based on its constitutional functions, according to the 1999 constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria. All data for the assessment of the impact are derived from field work carried out by the researcher.¹ Rural development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of the people in the rural areas. The main concern in rural development is supposed to be modernization, isolation to integration with the national economy for equitable and balanced development of the nation.² It is against the backdrop of the above definition of rural development that we shall that we shall try to investigate the extent Ovia North East local government council has been able to develop the rural areas.

The Organizational Structure of Ovia North East Local Government Council

Decrees 23 and 50 of 1991 provided for a separate Executive Arm of the Local Government distinct from the Local Legislative Council. The Executive Arm consists of Chairman, Vice Chairman, Supervisors and a Secretary appointed by the Chairman.³

We now turn to discuss the organizational structure of Ovia North East Local Government council.



Organization chart of local government. Source: Ola, E.G., Tonwe, DAN (2003) Local Administration and Local Government in Nigeria

Chairman of the Local Government

Prior to December 1987, each Local Government Council was required to elect its chairman from amongst the elected councillors for a term co-terminus with that of the

Council, and this was subject to the approval of the state governor and in some cases, as was the case in the defunct Bendel State, the Governor is merely informed through the Commissioner for Local Government. This position changed just before the December 12, 1987 local government elections when provision was made for the Chairman who has a Deputy to be directly elected by the people. The Chairman is the Chief Executive and Accounting Officer of the Local Government.⁴ He functions with the assistance of his Deputy, Supervisors and Secretary appointed by him.

The Vice Chairman of the Local Government

The aspirant for the office of Local Government Chairman nominates a Vice as his running mate before the actual campaign for Local Government elections kicks off. The success of a particular aspirant for the office of Local Government Chairman at the poll automatically means the success of his vice Chairman at the poll. The Chairman of the Local Government is required to assign specific responsibilities for any business of the Local Government to the Vice Chairman.⁵

Secretary to the Local Government

The 1976 Local Government Reform provided for a Chief Executive Officer who is the Administrative Head of the local Bureaucracy. He is designated Secretary to the Local Government Council. He is required to be a high ranking official not below salary grade level 12. Recent reform efforts have brought about changes not in the mode of appointment, but also in the tenure of Secretary to the Local Government. The Secretary to Local Government is now appointed by the Chairman of Local Government and holds

office at the pleasure of Chairman. The Secretary provides political and administrative direction to the local bureaucracy as a whole. He is also responsible for advising the Local Government generally helping the Chief Executive to ensure that the programmes and decisions of the Local Government are implemented.⁶

Supervisors

Prior to 1991, supervisory councillors (as they were called) were elected from among the elected members of local government council. The 1976 guidelines for local government Reform provided that the number should normally exceed four. The spate of reforms since 1976 has about phenomenal changes. The nomenclature “Supervisory councillor” has been changed to “Supervisor” A supervisor is now nominated by the Chairman of the Local Government from outside the local legislative council subject to the approval of the local council Where a member of the local legislature is appointed to the position of Supervisor, he/she will have to vacate his seat as a councillor. This requirement was occasioned by the fact that the legislative and executive arms of the Local government are now distinct organs. Supervisors, like the supervisory councillors of old are primarily responsible for the political direction and general policy of the government with regard to such departments assigned to them including the administration of any department or departments as the case may be. They are responsible to the chairman of the local government.⁷

The Executive Committee of the Local Government

Each Local Government in the country has a Cabinet which is the executive committee at the local level. The Executive committee is composed of the chairman of the Local Government and his vice, the supervisors and the secretary to the Local Government. Heads of Departments also attend and its meetings. The Executive committee is responsible for determining the general direction of the policies of the Local Government co-ordinating the activities of the local government, and charging the executive functions of the local government.⁸

The Bureaucratic Component of Local Government

There are three important aspects of the bureaucratic setup of local government in the country. The first is the Head of Personnel Management of the local bureaucracy. The heads of the various departments constitute the second aspect. The third is the subordinate personnel. These three aspects are examined below: Head of Personnel management The Head of Personnel Management under the present arrangement, strictly speaking is the highest official of the local bureaucracy, now that the office of the Secretary to the Local Government is now politicised and the position is filled appointment from within or outside the Unified Loc Government Service by the Chairman. He works closely with the Secretary to the Local Government and helps to coordinate the work of the various heads of departments as well as seeing to personnel matt in the Local Government as a whole. In the performance of duties, he is responsible to the Secretary to the Local Government.⁹

Heads of Local Government Departments

Below the Head of Personnel Management in Ovia North East Local Government in hierarchical set-up of the Local Government Department, Heads of Departments. They are responsible for executing policies and programmes of the Local Government at departmental level. They are also responsible for co-ordinating the work of the sections under them

The Subordinate Personnel

The subordinate personnel consist of those officers who are either under the Heads of Departments or the sectional heads and are responsible to their individual heads of departments or sectional heads. This category of personnel perform the duties assigned them by the officers they are responsible to.¹⁰

The Personnel System

All staff of the Local Government belongs to the Unified Local Government Service. Appointments, posting, promotion discipline, etc of the senior members of staff is done by Local Government Service Commission appointed by the State Government. To supplement the staff available to the Local Government under the Unified Local Government Service, provisions exist in the various Local Government Service, provisions exist in the various Local Government Laws in the country for officers belonging to the State Civil Service to be posted to the Local Governments on secondment. During the period of secondment, seconded officers are required to abide by the rules and regulations of the Unified Local Government Service and also to work in

consonance with the decisions of the Local Government they are posted to serve. Local Governments can also utilize the technical staff of the state agencies by way of seeking technical advice and assistance.¹¹

Provision of Health Services

Health they say is wealth. Ovia North East local government has been very mindful in improving the health care delivery system in each community within the local government. The study actually reveals performance in health sector as can be showcased within the year 1999-2019 by the local government authority. Based on the study carried out within the selected communities that make up Ovia North East, it show there are some basic health care services which help to treat communities women and children, especially during pregnancy.¹²



Photo showing the researcher conducting Interviewer with Mr. Friday Osazuwa, Photo taken by the researcher 29th September 2025

The some of these communities includes government hospital The Obazua Primary Health Centre, Ovbiogie Primary Healthcare and Okokhuo Primary Health Care and maternity ward was recently built under the last administration and commissioned; the health Centre is divided into what they call maternity ward and cottage hospital.¹³ The cottage hospital has few doctors who visits weekly it is only managed by few nurses when there is a serious case the patient is referred to University of Benin Teaching Hospital as the case may be. When there was need for bed, they will make use of one in the maternity ward.¹⁴

The maternity ward contains 10 beds for mothers and three beds for children generally, the local government did little in financing and executing project in the health centre between 2000 to 2019, drugs and health facilities were supply by the Ovia local government authority. According to Osarodion Efe explain that the local health officials usually carry out health enlightenment campaign in various wards of Ovia North East local government, and that this campaign help in educating members of the public on her to stay save and live an healthy life. Most times, Okokhuo women are given free medical test and treatment. Pregnancy was given special attention in major health centre in Ovia North East local government. although it should be noted the building of health centre in the local government needs some rehabilitation, because some parts of the roofs leaks water and some already in tittered shape.⁶ That fact is that the people of Okokhuo people also seek health services in private hospital within the local government.¹⁵

Provision of Education

Education is very important in the development of any society or community. In fact, any society that neglects education is doomed to perpetual hardship, and backwardness. Thus, John Dewey avers that the task of education is an emancipation and enlargement of experience. According to Plato with a good system of education almost any improvement is possible. This means that the standard of education provided by the total authorities determines the future life pattern and thought process of its inhabitants presently, Ovia North East local government has so many primary schools in communities within local government of with Okokhuo town is part of, out of these number, only ten school was known to have been built by the local government council. The rest were built by the various communities and religious organization and renovated by the state government.¹⁶

Despite obvious role of education in development of any society, Ovia North East local government according to our findings, did not execute project in educational sector from 1999–2007 specifically, the area of Adult education and vocational education, three centers are functioning in Okada community and funded by a nongovernmental education centers. In terms of primary school, for instance, in Okokhuo town, there is one functional primary school but need to be rehabilitated in one way or the other.¹⁷

Agriculture

It is an undisputable fact that Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy of almost all rural communities. This is reflected in the over view of the economy of Ovia

North East Local government. In spite of this immense contribution of Agriculture to both rural and national development. The investigation been carried out reveals that that the local government did and initiate a lot of project on Agricultural development of the constituent communities between 1999 to 2019.¹⁰

With the supply of agricultural equipment by the local government authority, aided by the multi-national company socio-corporate responsibility within the local government; the people of Ovia North East Local Government have continue to farm with modernize equipment with modern methods and chemicals provided. special provision of fertilizer at subsidized price was given to farmer between 2009 to 2016, this was capture in Edo state television authority when then chairman distributed 50 fishing out-board engine boats as well as N50,000 cash each to beneficiaries of his empowerment scheme in line with his reform agenda. While reading his address, Dr. Obosa pointed out that the effort of developing the local government area has been achieved by council with the help of the state government and other private companies situated in the locality. His words: “The development of Ovia North East is a task I am dedicated to with the resources available to the council.

But even at that, as a local government, the development of the local government is not something the council can do alone.” The council chairman emphasized that the private sector is a significant factor that could give faster pace to the economic and developmental effort of the local government. “The business opportunities here are

enormous and I call on captains of industries and individual entrepreneurs to take advantage of it,” Dr. Obosa said.¹⁸

Construction and Maintenance of Roads and Street Lightings

The condition of roads and streets are very important yard stick of measuring development of any community or society because they do not only enhance communication but improve their productive capacity. Observation carried out indicates that Ovia North East local government between 1999 to 2019 did a lot of communities network in the area of road construction and maintenance.¹⁹ For instance, in major Roads in the constituent communities of the local government are now passable and others are undergoing repair most especially during the raining season as a result of topography of the area. One major road constructed within the time frame of this study is Okokhuo road carried out by former administration and now under dualization by NDDC which up-till now has is uncompleted and the road from Okada to Obazua constructed by the local government council to the community which happens to be his home town, more so as a result of the most communities in the area are motorable.²⁰

Construction of Market/Motor Packs

There are various markets in Ovia North East Local Government Area. It is one of the variables to assess the impact of democracy towards rural development. The outstanding among the market in the various communities like modern Okokhuo market. It is located in the heart of the local council. The market has been operating with

community efforts but the Local government has executed or constructed ultra-modern and up grading the Okokhuo market to international standard. That was encouraging. Prior to the practice of democracy in the local council in 1999 to 2019, Osazuwa posits that there were occasional village markets every four days, but the enthronement of democracy paved way for construction of ultra-modern markets in the respective communities. Considering the fact that grassroots development or development from below has been widely claimed to be viable strategy of national development.²¹ Therefore, it is right to posit that local government has shown that it is only interested in sharing the national cake but does not make effort in baking the national cake. Clark asserts that development strategy in Africa was compounded because of lack of democracy, discipline and bureaucracy. As well as private sector was not given serious attention. Abah holds that the problem of urban centres cannot be solved unless rural areas are first solved. He maintains that urban migration is dysfunctional to rural development and need to be stemmed. It is undoubted that one of the lack of development projects in Okokhuo will be urban rural migration which does not only underdeveloped the communities but also hinders national development.²²

In the area of motor park construction, there were motor parks located at Okokhuo town, the transporters parked along the road (Okhuo Junction) and took passengers who came to the market or who were transiting from one town to another. Again, motorcycles ‘Okada’ became the chief means of transport. “The parks were properly maintained and the local government officials collect rates and fees from them”.²³ The markets and parks

formed the primary sources of the revenue for Ovia North East Local Government Council. Although, duties of Ovia North East Local Government are seen to be performed by the age-grade organization of the people, wealthy sons and daughters of the local government and the church organizations. In that regard, the LGC failed to develop the communities for which they were created despite huge sums of money allocated to the council from the Federation Account. One may then be tempted to wonder and ask what the council members used the money from the Federation Account to do if they could not perform their mandatory duties.²⁴

S/N	Project	Location	Cost	Level of Completion
1	Construction and equipping of a modern health centre.	Olukun/Okada	Fifteen million naira.	Completed and commissioned
2.	a. Construction of 1km wood walkway. b. Construction of 0.5km wood walkway.	Adolor (Ekiadolor) Eko-Ekpetin	Two million naira.	Completed and commissioned
3	Construction of 4km wood walkway, flyover and jetties.	Linking Isiuwa, Iyowa and Ukpoke	Seven million naira	Completed and commissioned
4.	Construction of 7 conveniences (Toilets)	Egboha	Two hundred thousand naira	Completed and commissioned
5.	Recreation jetty for relaxation	Front of the local government council Okada secretariat	Two hundred thousand naira	Completed and commissioned
6.	Construction of twelve lockup stores.	Okokhuo	1.5 million naira.	Completed and commissioned
7	A canopy jetty market.	Okada	One thousand naira.	Completed and commissioned

Economy

The inhabitants of Ovia North East Local government council are predominant farmers and small proportion who derives their livelihood from petty-trading, hand craft and white collar jobs. There are farmers of both crops and livestock. Palm wine tapers, government and private sector workers etc. Agricultural activities are carried out essentially for subsistence and commercial purposes. Hence, we believe that with the above over view of the environment of Okada, it has provided an adequate ground for assessment of the impact of democracy on grass root development. Therefore, it is very pertinent we proceed to the impact of local government on rural development in the next section.²⁵

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CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

The foregoing discussion is on economic activities in the Okokhuo town in the pre-colonial period. The pre-colonial period refers to the epoch prior to the European imperial incursion into the area that later constituted the Republic of Nigeria. The Okokhuo town was one the traditional polities that make up the Ovia group. The Ovia north east is situated in today's Edo South Senatorial District with presumably the largest population in a state with ethnic groups, such as Benin, (Bini). The Okokhuo town as the study indicates was home to elaborate economic activities since migration, which was generally accepted to be from Benin.

Summary

Having migrated largely, from Benin, and settled where they now live, gradually, the community split into towns which includes Owere, Ogie Quarter, Odaro, Amah, and Osadinmwin. These towns were ruled directly by the eldest man in Okokhuo town under a sort of clan-federation. The towns and their villages, further constituted units of government that strengthened the town administratively. Like the kingdom, the towns and the villages were governed by the eldest men in a system that was both gerontocratic and egalitarian. The unique feature of Okokhuo traditional socio-political institutions is that everybody, respective of status was important and had a vital role to play. Society was divided into different groups that worked separately but co-operatively. The men,

women and youths of divergent categories were stratified into a workable system of government that served the needs of the people well.

Moreover, having established an effective socio-political mechanism, they equally instituted effective economic activities to meet their material and transactive needs. The study of economic activities in pre-colonial Okokhuo town was a good exercise in unearthing a virile traditional economic system, solely designed by the people. Life became suitable and attractive through the institution of sources of income and expenditure. Economic activities in Okokhuo town was all-encompassing in the sense that the major economic pursuits, viz, agriculture, industry and trade were predominant and widely practiced by all sections of the traditional polity. Generally the study of economic activities in pre-colonial Okokhuo was in elaborate excursion into, traditional labor system, land acquisition and tenureship, division of labor, trading currencies and traditional scientific and technological prowess of the people.

One of these economic activities was agriculture, which involved both food and cash crops production and rearing of animals, otherwise known as animal husbandry. Agriculture was a universal economic endeavor as almost everybody was part and parcel of it. It was a household or individual effort that revolved mostly around subsistent production and limited production for sales in the local and far markets. Crops, such as maize, okro, vegetables, banana, yam, cocoa-yam, palm-trees, coconut and melon were planted for both consumption and sale. Land acquisition and labor procurement were functions of the village and family, respectively. However, during the rainy season,

between March and October, agriculture took the centre stage of economic pursuit as people engaged in the planting or harvesting of one crop and another.

Moreover, agricultural was not the only economic activity, traditional industrial manufacturing also held sway. Industries are places where goods are produced to meet all human needs. All kinds of industry existed in Okokhuo town. These industries were responsible for the production of a wide range of goods, such as, mats, chair, pomade, cream, salt, clothes, palm-oil, and gin. Every Okokhuo household was known for the manufacturing of one industrial goods or the other. These productions served the consumption and the transactive needs of the people.

Equally, Okokhuo people engaged themselves in trading activities, whereby, two form of trade held sway: internal and external trade. The internal trade was the trade within Okokhuo town, that is, among the various towns that makes up the kingdom. It was a periodic and rotational trade with stringent commercial rules and regulations to protect the trade, as it was very important to the people. Meanwhile, the external trade was between Okokhuo town and near Ovia neighbors and distant people. This trade was limited in size and scope, because it requires huge capital and specialization to start. It was not a free entry and free exit form of trading activity.

As stated earlier and repeated here, the study is a good academic enquiry into the elaborate and glorious past of the people. Salient issues and discoveries have been discussed and made, respectively. On the issue of origin, the entire Okokhuo town converted on one point: that they all had Benin origin and ancestry and that all the Benin

connection helped them to shape their monarchical and social institutions. The study also discovered that their socio-political institutions were designed for societal survival and prosperity. These institutions had the necessary checks and balances to respond to group or individual behavioral excesses.

Many fine discoveries have been unearthed, as far as, economic activities were concerned. First, there existed great order in land procurement, movement of labor and trading activities. Agriculture was not only an economic activity, but a cultural endeavor, whereby everybody saw it as the only means of providing the society with the most basic need of men, which is food, hence, a universal interest and participation in it. Wonderful things also featured prominently in industrial activities. One, the scientific and technological capabilities that accompanied industrial productions were internal phenomena, which were not externally generated. This confers on the study of a comprehensive dislodging of the Hamitic hypotheses that black Africans in all their civilizing efforts were supported by alien and foreign forces. Also, trade in Okokhuo town was a response to natural human needs that man must exchange what he has for what he does not have.

Conclusion

Therefore, as the study shows that Okokhuo town was a classical example of a people's resilience and desire to tame natural disadvantages for societal prosperity through resilient practical approaches. The study which was largely carried out by both primary and secondary materials is not a conclusive one, but a pacesetter that will spur

more fruitful academic enquiry into the past of a local civilization, known as the Okokhuo town is known for its unique people and institution.

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Friday Osazuwa,	53yrs	Civil Servant & Indigene of Okokhuo	Ovia North East LGA,	12/09/2025
Obaro Osamudiamen,	67yrs,	Traditional Palace Chief,	Benin City,	28/08/2025.
Obasohan Omorogbe,	66yrs	Civil Servant,	Okokhuo Town	28/08/2025.
Omorodion, F. A.	65yrs	Traditional Chief,	Benin City,	13/08/2025.
Omoruyi, F.	54yrs	Traditional Palace Chief,	Benin City,	28/08/2025.
Orobosa Effomon,	68yrs	Traditional Palace Chief	Benin City,	9/08/2025.
Osamudiamen, S.	52yrs	Teacher	Edopkolor School, Benin City,	28/July/2025.
Osarodion Efe,	49yrs	Civil Servant,	Ovia North East L.G.A	23/09/2025

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